

VII.—*The Cabots.*

Notes addressed to the Royal Society of Canada in rectification of some statements in papers contributed by Mr. S. E. Dawson to the Transactions of 1894, 1895 and 1897.

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(Presented by Sir John Bourinot and read May 25th, 1898.)

I.

“*Mr. Harrisse, who, in his ‘John and Sebastian Cabot,’ had written in favour of Cape Breton, has, in his latest book, ‘The Discovery of North America,’ gone back to Labrador. He [had previously] decided for Cape Percy.*” (Dr. Dawson’s monograph of 1894, p. 54; of 1896, p. 19; of 1898, p. 141.)

If during many years Dr. Dawson believed the landfall of John Cabot to have been in Newfoundland, and afterwards believed that it was at Cape Breton, I do not see why I could not believe as well in 1896 Cabot’s landfall to have been in Labrador, supposing that in 1882 I believed it was at Cape Breton. But, as luck will have it, I happen never to have written “in favour of Cape Breton,” and still less to have “decided for Cape Percy.”

What I have said is, that *the map of 1544 located the landfall in Cape Breton, or at Cape Percy.* And at the same time, I expressed my lack of confidence either in that cartographical averment or in the map itself. Here are the very words written by me on the subject in 1882, in the “*John and Sebastian Cabot :*” “*La localité indiquée sur la mappemonde de 1544 comme atterrissage de Jean et de Sébastien Cabot en 1497, ne peut être, d’après ce document, que le pays correspondant sur nos cartes à l’île du Cap Breton.*” (Jean et Sébastien Cabot, Paris, 1882, p. 64.)

“*C’est donc au Cap Percé, et nulle part ailleurs que, selon la carte de 1544, Jean et Sébastien Cabot ont atterri ; c’est là que, les premiers entre les navigateurs du XV^e siècle, ils auraient [sic, and not ‘ils ont’] foulé le sol du continent américain.*” (*Op. cit.*, p. 66.)

“*Cette analyse repose sur la présomption que les profils de la mappemonde de Cabot proviennent de documents cartographiques contemporains de la découverte. Peut-on cependant affirmer ce fait et voir dans ces délinéations une fidèle copie des épures de Jean Cabot ou de son fils ?*” (*Loc. cit.*)

“*Il importe de résoudre cette question, car si la carte de 1544 a été dressée entièrement de mémoire, ou d’après des relevés faits par des carto-*

graphes français ou portugais, trente ou quarante ans après la découverte, toutes les analyses de ce document pêchent par la base, et c'est peine perdue de s'évertuer pour en résoudre les points douteux." (*Op. cit.*, p. 67.)

I then proceeded to show that the Canadian portion of Cabot's planisphere has been plagiarized from a Dieppe map, adding the following remark :

" Si notre théorie est exacte, le lecteur se rendra compte du peu de garantie qu'offre un point d'atterrissement établi dans ces conditions, et combien peuvent être contestables les contours qui servent de base à une approximation aussi tardive." (*Op. cit.*, p. 84.)

" Il est donc possible que, malgré les assertions, Cabot ait atterri en 1497, non à l'île du Cap Breton, mais sur la côte du Labrador. Il était même dans la nature des choses que, partis de Bristol, les Cabots vinssent y aborder, plutôt qu'à l'entrée du golfe St-Laurent. (*Op. cit.*, p. 96.)

II.

" *In his latter books Mr. Harrisson transferred the landfall to the absolutely impossible Cape Chidley. In dwelling upon the amazing quantity of codfish as a crucial indication of the true landfall, Mr. Harrisson has conclusively disproved his main thesis, for the codfish do not arrive at Cape Chidley until August 15th, five days after John Cabot is known to have been in London.*" (*Dr. Dawson's monograph of 1896*, p. 10.)

This argument of Dr. Dawson has found great favour with Canadian critics, who have not failed to herald it, and in very disobligeing terms, as a complete refutation of whatever opinions I may have held regarding Cabot's landfall.

Unfortunately, Dr. Dawson to-day frankly confesses that he "has fallen into error" when he stated that I had "transferred the landfall to Cape Chidley," and in his further statement that I had "dwelled upon the amazing quantity of codfish as a crucial indication of the landfall." (*Dr. Dawson's monograph of 1898*, pp. 154-5.)

So far, so good.

III.

" *If John Cabot could have got there [i.e., Labrador] 'two or three weeks before June 24th,' which is Mr. Harrisson's last theory, or even on June 24 or July 3, there would have been no fish, for the fish does not strike at that latitude until about July 15.*" (*Monograph of 1898*, p. 155.)

Prof. H. Y. Hind's table, quoted by Dr. Dawson, gives as the mean date of arrival of cod in southern Labrador, at Chateau Bay, 20th June. Now, John Cabot does not say *when* and *where* he first observed the amaz-

ing quantity of cod. He may have noticed it only *on his return from Cape Chidley*. And if, according to my hypothesis, he effected his homeward-bound voyage from Labrador to Bristol in about thirty-four days, there is nothing to prevent his having seen the phenomenon of the fishes in Southern Labrador June 20th, and afterwards, since he reached England early in August, 1497.

IV.

"*Mr. Harrisse naturally concludes Fagundes went up the Gulf of St. Lawrence for fresh water. To a Canadian the absurdity of vessels coming up from the Maritime provinces to Quebec for fresh water is palpable.*" (Monograph of 1894, p. 52.)

Although I was not to the manor born, I know enough of the topography of Canada never to have said that Fagundes' vessels "came up from the Maritime provinces to Quebec for fresh water." Interpreting the letters patent granted to him as showing that he made the peripus of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (see the map, *Discov.*, plate ix., p. 186), I inferred that in the course of this exploration Fagundes entered the River St. Lawrence, where finding fresh water he may have filled his casks. Where is the absurdity? Is it that there is no fresh water in the St. Lawrence river?

V.

"*Mr. Harrisse builds a theory that Grajales made the map of Sebastian Cabot.*" (Dr. Dawson's monograph of 1894, p. 107.)

I have neither built a theory nor said that Grajales "made the map." I have only stated that Grajales wrote the legends, which is a very different thing. My language was as follows:

"*Grajales wrote the long series of legends which were printed with the famous planisphere of Sebastian Cabot.*" (*Discovery of N. America*, p. 720); and nowhere in any of my works did I ever even as much as intimated that Grajales had anything to do with the cartographical part of the map.

The title of the manuscript containing the Spanish text of the said legends proves the truth of my statement. It is verbatim as follows: "Tiene un tratado de la carta navagar hecho por el Doctur Grajales en el Puerto de Sancta Maria, i el uso de dos Tablas, para saber el orto del Sol, i los ocasos desde el altura de 38. grados hasta la de 48. por el mismo."

In English it is literally as follows: "It contains a treatise concerning the sailing chart, made [i.e., the *Treatise*, not the chart] by Dr. Grajales at Puerto de Sancta Maria, together with the use of two tables to ascertain the rising of the sun, and the setting thereof, from the altitude of 38° to 48°, made by the same."

So that Grajales did not merely "copy the legends for his own information," nor did he "certainly [or at all] copy out Columbus' account of his third voyage," as Dr. Dawson says. [Monograph of 1898, p. 200.] On the contrary, Grajales was the *author* of the legends, and also the *author* of the two tables of latitudes inserted in the body of the map, and engraved with it, as Dr. Dawson can see from his own photographic reproduction of Cabot's planisphere. The collecting and copying of the various tracts in the MS. of the king's library at Madrid, was the work of some one else.

VI.

"*Mr. Harrisse is unable to recognize the square island at the mouth of the gulf as Cape Breton.*" (Monograph of 1894, p. 77).

Here is what I wrote two years before Dr. Dawson made the above remark, and in a work frequently cited by him :

"Our opinion is that we have here the earliest imagery of Cape Breton island, transmitted through Portuguese maps now lost." (*Discovery of N. America*, p. 239).

VII.

Referring to my description of the voyage of Fagundes, Dr. Dawson says (Monograph of 1894, p. 9) : "It does not seem reasonable to invoke the aid of a map dated 1563 to prove a discovery affirmed to have been made in 1521." Do not my learned opponent and those who follow in his wake invoke the Cabotian map of 1544 to prove a discovery made in 1497 ?

VIII.

I have never said that Cabot's crew hunted on shore and replenished their stock of provisions "along to Cape Chidley and back." (Monograph of 1898, p. 154); nor that "the Burgundian on board John Cabot's ship was Johannes Ruysch." (*Op. cit.*, p. 158).

I might easily cite other instances of regrettable inadvertence on the part of the zealous champion of Sebastian Cabot's virtue and superlative merits. These will doubtless suffice.